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ABSTRACT

Every spring there is a great exodus: graduating consultants depart from the writing lab, taking with them semesters and semesters of experience, and leaving a gap in the ranks of the staff. This paper discusses a way lab directors can learn from them: departing consultants wrote short essays entitled "Advice to the Future" which provided information on three or four ways to be successful in a lab. The paper presents an analysis of the consultants' comments, which were classified, often sentence by sentence. Data in the paper is organized into the following three areas: (1) What do these experienced consultants worry about the most? (2) What do they think new consultants should know? and (3) What "tutorese" can directors use in their own training? The paper concludes by stating that what was gleaned from the departing tutors' writings can be applied in the future: expanding training categories; focusing more on the affective side of tutoring; using the consultants' vernacular itself for its accuracy and poignancy. Attached are two "Advice" papers. (NKA)

**'And Be Silent, That You May Hear':
What Consultants Can Tell Directors about Working in a Writing Lab**

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'And Be Silent, That You May Hear':

What Consultants Can Tell Directors about Working in a Writing Lab

It happens each spring. And I do not necessarily mean the return of blooming crocus and daffodils. I refer, instead, to a great exodus: graduating consultants depart from the lab, taking with them semesters and semesters of experience, always leaving a Grand Canyon gap in the ranks of the staff. Because consultants are the greatest resource of labs, it is no wonder that we lab directors look with dismay (not to mention dread) on the turning over of the calendar to April, which is, indeed, T. S. Eliot's cruelest month.

If all that experience did not merely walk out the lab at the end of spring term, if these consultants could somehow leave behind some of their hard-fought, well-earned wisdom, then those who follow them in the fall (the new consultants as well as those still staying in the lab) could learn from their work in the front line trenches.

After all, departing consultants know best what are the hardest parts of their jobs, what are the most demanding aspects, and what other consultants should know in order to be successful. And, if I, as a director, could hear their voices and preserve their thoughts, I, too, would gain insight into the working of the lab, and, even, be better able to train the new consultants arriving each fall.

How can the "escaping knowledge" be preserved?

Before the departing consultants vanished into the job market or graduate school, I designed a way to learn from them. Departing consultants wrote short essays

entitled "Advice to the Future" (like creating time capsules), advice which provided information on three or four ways to be successful in a lab. The advice could cover any aspect of their work, with the choices left entirely to the consultants. Then, this advice from twenty-eight consultants, averaging two-years experience and being primarily undergraduates with various majors, was placed in a notebook available for all consultants to read. Collected over eight years, Advice to the Future offers a wealth of insight provided by experienced consultants reflecting on their work.

Reading these advice pieces, so highly sensitive to the nature of being consultants, reveals what consultants think is important about their writing lab experience, making their comments valuable to all who tutor in a lab. (See the appendix for two examples of Advice to the Future.)

How Were the Advice Pieces Analyzed?

After reading the advice pieces with their concerned and caring voices, I found the best way to explore, analyze, and learn from the consultants' comments was to classify their remarks, often sentence by sentence. Below is a table showing how the consultants' comments fell under various topics and how many comments occurred per topic:

Advice to the Future

Topic	Number of Comments
Consulting Process ¹	27
Feelings of Consultants Themselves	24
Clients' Need for Self-Assurance	17
Day-to-Day Procedures	14
Using Resources	14
Nature of Collaboration	10
Relationship with Fellow Consultants	10
Relationship Vis-a-Vis Professors	5
Grammar and Punctuation	5
Writing Process of Both Consultants and Clients	5
Clients with Difficult Behavior	4
Literature Students	3
International / LD / Non-Traditional Students	3
Roles Forced to Play	3
Role Outside of the Writing Lab	1

[NOTE: Since the comments fell into several categories, the total is higher than the twenty-eight consultants who wrote advice.]

What Did I Discover as a Director?

As a director of a lab for thirteen years, I am always searching for new training ideas; the consultants' writings offered many. I will not drag my dear reader through each of the categories on the table, like a doting grandmother cornering unsuspecting victims to show them her grandchildren's photographs. Instead, to show what I discovered as a director and what I can use in training sessions, I will organize the data into the following three areas:

- ▶ What do these experienced consultants worry about the most?
- ▶ What do they think new consultants should know?
- ▶ What "tutorese" can directors use in their own training?

What Do Experienced Consultants Worry About the Most?

As a director, I was surprised to find that experienced consultants mentioned far more topics (a total of 15) than I could have predicted, and their concerns were more varied than I had ever anticipated, ranging from their work inside the lab to greeting clients on the campus. Such a large number of diverse topics means that I must consider expanding my training, perhaps even using the categories actually listed in the table and focusing on each topic during training sessions.

Looking at the numbers tallied on the table reveals another vital point. The top-rated categories of "Day-to-Day Procedures" (14 comments) and "Relationship with Fellow Consultants" (10 comments) indicate tutors are concerned about being--what they call--"professional." To them, this term means carrying out daily duties in the lab and being able to get along with their fellow workers. Certainly, this concern arose

because, for many of them, the writing lab position was their first major job, or as one consultant confessed, "It's the first job I have had where I had to think." So, it was only natural that they would explore this concept of professionalism in their "Advice to the Future" with wise words, such as "Tutors should rely on fellow consultants instead of trying to bear the burden of knowing all the ins and outs of the composition process" (Laurel Marling),² or "Don't be shy; say hello to your fellow consultants around campus and at work. Creating rapport will be a step toward building a network of support, which, believe me, is comforting to have" (Tammy Raabe). As a director, I now realize that during training, I must be sure to describe how the new consultants can be professional in their jobs.

Looking at the top categories in the table shows another prominent topic: it is, not surprisingly, the "Consulting Process" itself. Because of its twenty-seven responses (the most for any category), the consultants were so concerned about assisting clients that they were eager to share "secrets of the trade" with their fellow workers. In other words, experienced consultants know how tough a job it is to consult with others so they are willing to tell what they have learned about the process, such as, "Don't let the client force you into writing the thesis" (Caroline Rothfuss) and "Be sure to ask about the assignment sheet" (Beth Peebles).

Knowing the consultants want to help their co-workers can serve me well as a director; I can use this attitude to motivate them to train others, acting as mentors. With only a bit of flattery, for instance, I can persuade a consultant to help another consultant by saying, "Gosh, you know a lot about working with international students.

Could you share this experience with the rest of us in a staff meeting?"

What Should New Consultants Know In Order To Be Successful?

The advice pieces also revealed what the experienced consultants thought the new ones should know in order to be successful, with this advice falling into three types: affective, practical, and philosophical.

Affective Advice

First is the affective side to being a successful consultant. What was remarkable was the large number of comments (a total of 51) focusing on emotions (both of the consultants and of the clients): "Feelings of Consultants Themselves" (24); "Clients' Need for Self-Assurance" (17), and "Relationship with Fellow Consultants" (10). In fact, the advice tended to lay bare the consultants' souls, revealing how powerful had been the tutoring experience for them.

For example, although most training manuals indicate that consultants should control their feelings, there are times, according to the Advice Pieces, when it is useful for consultants to talk about how they feel, especially about writing. Doing so can advance a tutorial. As a consultant wrote, "When you expose yourself as an 'imperfect writer', you validate the difficulty all writers experience when faced with the task of writing" (Laurel G. Marling). Another consultant advised her fellow workers to become excited: "The more excited you are about their papers, the more eager your clients will be to work hard. Ultimately, you set the tone of the session" (Susan Burr).

On the other hand, sessions with clients can be emotionally draining for

consultants. What advice do experienced tutors offer to handle the constant pull on the heart? Three key suggestions, based on the category "Feelings of Consultants Themselves," are the following: having patience, recognizing limitations, and achieving a balance.

In confessional detail, a consultant stressed the need for patience with one's self: "Do not feel discouraged when you do not know something. One of the greatest benefits of the Writing Lab is that both clients and consultants learn from their time there" (Alice France). Another emphasized that consultants must recognize their own limitations: "You should not forget that you are only human after all and cannot turn everyone into William Faulkner" (Chris Hornsby). Once a session ends, consultants advised new workers that they should maintain an emotional balance:

Many times, I've thought of a better way to help after the consultation was over.

While I've wished that I had thought of this earlier, I try to remember that I helped them to the best of my ability at that time. That's more help than they would have received if I hadn't worked with them at all. (Melinda Rose)

I find these types of advice to be mini-consultations among the consultants themselves, and, as an eavesdropper learning about how they see their affective roles, I can now better prepare new consultants for the emotional terrain they traverse as they work in the lab, warning them about the pitfalls and traps lying ahead.

I gained other insight as well. The advice pieces taught me how the clients probably see the consultants. Using a variation on the "suits" image found in business, a consultant explained the clients' emotional reaction to tutors:

Clients walk in sheepishly, only to find a group of normal-looking folks with name tags; instantly, the clients are intimidated. . . . Finally, one of the name tags sits down next to the client and asks the student to read aloud his paper.

The client is mortified. A professor has just used a red pen to butcher the paper, and now the client is being asked to read it to someone who might just cut it down orally. (Dennis Maxwell)

Such a description helps directors show new consultants "how to see ourselves as others see us."

As a director, I had not stressed another topic during my training, only learning to do so by reading the consultants' advice pieces. This topic was the emotional role of the consultants outside the lab. As one consultant wrote, "One does not stop being a consultant. When you see clients walking around campus, be sure to say hello to them. Don't ignore them. You formed relationships with these people in the lab, and not recognizing them outside of the lab hurts those relationships" (Susan Burr). Of course! I should have realized, as this consultant so well states, that the lab does, indeed, have no walls, a perspective that directors should certainly emphasize in their training sessions.

Practical Advice

Under the category "Consulting Process," consultants also offered new tutors what may be called "practical" techniques for helping clients. As might be expected, the consultants presented the advice found so often in training manuals, recommendations, such as "Consider each tutoring session as unique" or "Let clients

set the tone. "

But, one practical tip not always stressed in training manuals did arise. One consultant explained how to get clients "engaged" with their own writing:

Be inquisitive towards clients because it not only relays to your client that you are interested, but it also often sparks an interest within the client about his or her writing. . . .When a writer decides that his paper is valuable and does have a purpose, the writer then holds it more tightly. He wants to claim it as his instead of wishing that it had never been written. (Corinne Leavanway)

This tip stands out because in its directness and clarity it reveals that consulting often means caring about the prose of clients so clients will care, too.

Still another novel angle to stress in training arose. A bugaboo for all labs is handling the concept of "correctness" in students' papers. Clients whose dialects may not match those of the academy often feel frustrated when their professors mark them down for not using Standard Edited English. If this frustration is not dispelled, clients may "turn off" from their college experience. My training had mentioned that consultants should show clients SEE is only one dialect, albeit the dialect of the academy; a consultant, however, offered a new way to help students develop a proper rhetorical perspective on the strict demands of SEE:

. . . [W]hen a writer claims something as his own, he wants it to be correct. The comma corrections and proper transitions become more than a pointless part of the academic world. They become a code that helps a writer communicate his ideas more clearly. (Corrinne Leavanway)

Certainly, in all my future training of new tutors, I will stress, as this consultant has suggested: writers should choose SEE not because it is the dominant code but because the writers have cared enough to want readers to understand their ideas. SEE, then, is a rhetorical choice.

Philosophical Advice

Besides the emotional and practical sides of working in the lab, consultants often stressed to new tutors the need to understand the true role of a lab. The comments, for instance, implied new tutors should see that knowing grammar and punctuation will not be the only parts of their jobs. Even if many campuses misperceive labs as mere comma clinics where papers are proofread, the advice pieces provided only five comments on grammatical problems or punctuation questions (See the category "Grammar and Punctuation."). This paucity of comments indicates experienced consultants see their jobs as handling all parts of the writing process, a key point to be stressed to new tutors who might misunderstand their jobs as only playing grammar goddesses or gods.

New consultants, based on the advice pieces, also need to know that consulting is a reciprocal experience. Far from being gurus sitting on a hill and dispensing pearls of wisdom to the clients down below, consultants should, according to an experienced consultant, "Learn as much as you can about your own writing process from the writer you help. . . . Use the knowledge you gain from the consultation to enhance your own writing and show your clients how much fun reworking a sentence or analyzing a poem can be" (Laurel Marling). New consultants need to know, indeed, that clients help them

as much as they help the clients.

And, finally, as implied by the advice pieces, new tutors must learn another vital philosophical point. Consulting a client is paradoxical: the recurrent pattern is that there is no pattern. Although clients do fall into types ("doe-eyed freshman and pompous senior"), they are also unique (LD students, complaining clients et al.). Once new workers realize this ever-present paradox in writing labs, they can become flexible enough to help all clients.

What "Tutorese" Can Directors Use in Their Training?

As all directors quickly acknowledge, being able to speak to consultants in their own vernacular instantly creates a rapport between tutors and directors. Reading the advice, I hunted for tutorese which could slip effortlessly into my own training sessions, thus crystalizing for new workers various issues.

For three particular topics, I found the tutor vernacular especially sharp and distinctive. The first was describing the bane of many a consultation: what to focus on when the clients' paper has both higher-ordered and lower-ordered problems. As one consultant so succinctly advised, "Focus on the head wounds, instead of the knee scrapes" (Teresa Goodlett). The second area yielding an exceptional metaphor couched as only a peer tutor could say it was that for the tutorial frame. Although it is now a cliché to refer to labs as open doors, one consultant found a novel phrasing for this banality:

Always greet the clients as they walk in the door, doe-eye freshman and pompous senior alike. Then, at the end, invite them back. Yes, we want our

clients to become grammatically and rhetorically self-sufficient, but an audience can help even the most accomplished writers. By telling them, 'Feel free to come back any time, at any stage of a paper, for any class,' we open the door when they leave instead of closing it. (Teresa Goodlett)

The third verbal gem, among many, that struck me as golden for tutor training arose as advice for handling the complaining student, especially the one who makes the session hard to conduct because she is saying things like, "I hate the professor. He's stupid and ugly." The advice was

[T]ry your best to put her sentiments into perspective. Let her know that we've all disliked professors before, but that she'll make it through the semester if she takes things one step at a time--and what better first step than to have visited the Writing Lab? (Teresa Goodlett)

Is it a "cheat" to use the phraseology of consultants, perhaps making a director seem as if he is pandering to tutors? Actually, not. Such vernacular conveys unimpeachable authority, giving the training session much greater impact when clothed in tutorese.

Objections

It might be argued that the concerns revealed through the advice pieces were lab specific. However, with the possible exception of some local issues (like finding resources in the lab's book shelves), the advice demonstrated that the interaction between tutor and client is a human relationship involving, as the consultants stressed, universal emotions. These issues are not limited to any one lab. Typical of tutors who work in labs from Alaska to Florida, these consultants were concerned, compassionate

workers who cared as much for their fellow consultants as they did for the clients.

Conclusion

In Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, Brutus advises, "And Be Silent, That You May Hear" (3.2.13). Indeed, I have heard from the consultants. As a result, I can apply what was gleaned from the departing tutors' writings: expanding training categories; focusing more on the affective side of tutoring (especially as clients see the lab); using the consultants' vernacular itself for its accuracy and poignancy.

And will capturing all this escaping knowledge of the departing consultants make me---or any lab director, for that matter--- an "expert" on labs? I offer the following definition of an "expert": "One who is just beginning to understand how little he knows about a subject" (Esar's 97). Perhaps. . . just perhaps, if I continue to listen to the consultants who have spoken loudly, clearly, persuasively (as they do with clients), I can, indeed, become more of an "expert."

Endnotes

1. "Consulting process" means the consultants mentioned specific situations encountered in a consultation, such as, "Don't let the client force you into writing the thesis" (Caroline Rothfuss), or they provided explicit tutoring techniques, such as "Always greet the clients as they walk in the door" (Teresa Goodlett).

The classification "Nature of Collaboration," however, refers to theoretical reflections, as in "Our role is to import experience without lording it over the client" (Dennis Maxwell).

2. As all lab directors know, there is no lab without the consultants whom I would like to thank for their energy, concern, interest, and, above all, their sincerity.

Appendix
"Advice to the Future"

I have learned mounds of information about writing since I've been working here at the Lab. If I had to reduce all of this information to a mole hill, I would tell future consultants to be inquisitive when working with clients. Not only does an inquisitive attitude relay to your client that you are interested, but it also often sparks an interest within the client about his or her writing. A general interest in what is being written does more good for the paper than anything else can. When a writer decides that his paper is valuable and does have a purpose, the writer then holds it more tightly. He wants to claim it as his instead of wishing that it had never been written. And when a writer claims something as his own, he wants it to be correct. The comma corrections and proper transitions become more than a pointless part of the academic world. They become a code that helps a writer communicate his ideas more clearly.

Best of luck,

Corinne Levanway

"Advice to the Future"

Do not underestimate the challenge of the writing task. What seems innately easy to you may be the greatest of challenges for a struggling writer.

Smile and focus on the person with whom you are working. The advice you give and the way in which you deliver your remarks may make the difference between encouraging a writer to explore the language or swaying a writer to deplore the writing task. Be conscious of the potential power your words hold for the writers who use the lab.

Admit your writing weaknesses and rely on fellow consultants instead of trying to bear the burden of knowing all the ins and outs of the composition process. When you expose yourself as an "imperfect writer," you validate the difficulty all writers experience when faced with the task of writing.

Learn as much as you can about your own writing process from the writers you help. Enjoy the individuality of people's thoughts and the way in which they present them. Use the knowledge you gain from your consultations to enhance your own writing, and show your clients how much fun reworking a sentence or analyzing a poem can be.

Take the time to read through the shelves of resource books that line the back wall of the lab. These books can be a great source of information for you and your clients.

Take home several grammar exercises, and reacquaint yourself with the basics. This practice will help you immeasurably when writers ask about "I" and "me," or "who"

and "whom."

Treasure your experience as a consultant. Laurel Graham Marling

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